

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 4-AWASHINGTON TIMES
10 May 1985

Chemical weapons proliferation spurred by business, panel says

By Tom Diaz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Commercial firms are becoming highly involved in the rapid spread of chemical weapons to Third World countries, intelligence officials told the Senate Armed Services committee in a secret briefing yesterday.

According to an informed source, some members of the committee who were not familiar with the data were unpleasantly surprised by the extent of the so-called "proliferation" problem described by the intelligence briefers.

Although the source would not discuss details of any of the highly classified information discussed in the briefing, he did describe the general subjects discussed and the thrust of the information given the committee.

A major subject touched on was the increasing involvement of commercial firms in the spread of the deadly weapons.

According to the source, part of the problem is that both the manufacturing equipment and the chemicals needed to make chemical warfare weapons may be bought by themselves for what appear to be legitimate commercial applications.

Taking advantage of this, certain countries are buying the manufacturing equipment from some firms and the chemicals from other firms. Unless the two purchases are connected, it isn't apparent that a country is developing a chemical warfare capability. And it is equally difficult to control the spread of the munitions.

The source said the United States generally has such sales under con-

trol, but the same is not true for other countries in the world which supply either the manufacturing equipment or chemicals involved. The United States is aware of which countries and which companies are involved in the commerce, he said. Most of the countries about which authorities are most highly concerned are not in the Western hemisphere, he indicated.

He said the United States hasn't adequately focused its attention on the burgeoning growth of chemical weapons in the Third World, and that U.S. policymakers must shift their focus from the NATO front to the rapid change in the rest of the world.

The Soviets' lead in the field of chemical warfare is widely acknowledged, even among those who oppose the administration's desire to begin rebuilding the U.S.

military's retaliatory capability. (The United States stopped manufacturing chemical weapons in 1969, and officials say that much of its existing stock is outdated and dangerously deteriorated.)

He said the United States has generally good intelligence information about the Soviet Union's chemical warfare capability but doesn't have as good information about — and is gravely concerned over — the potential scope of Soviet biochemical experiments.

Experts have warned in public literature on the subject that extraordinarily devastating weapons could be unleashed by the application of so-called "genetic engineering" and other technologies to biological warfare. New disease strains or strains resistant to known cures could be developed from such research.

Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., said at a hearing last week that he believes some classified information regarding Soviet chemical weapons capabilities should be made public.

"If the American people heard that, it would scare the hell out of them," he said.